



# FOIA Monthly Meeting

January 2015



- FEAT
- Databases for public access
- FOIA Internet site
- Quarterly Reports
- Reprocessing of FOIA requests
- MS Outlook Searches



# FOIA Expert Assistance Team (FEAT)

November 2014

- EPA receives approximately 11,000 FOIAs per year
- EPA uses a distributed model for responding to FOIAs
- Potential issues with a distributed model
  - Accountability
  - Consistency
  - Timeliness
  - Sustained understanding of FOIA intricacies

- Strategically centralized solution:
  - Formation of FOIA Expert Assistance Team (FEAT)
  - Team consults and assists lead office for selected FOIAs
    - Process
    - Substantive
- Complements existing program/policy and procedures:
  - Continues with Lead Office model (“action office”)
  - Retains role of FOIA Coordinator



## Process – Overview

- OEI program staff reviews incoming requests and assigns to lead office
- FEAT also reviews incoming requests and identifies those requests that could benefit from enhanced oversight/assistance
  - FEAT members serve as “case managers” for selected FOIAs: counseling, training, quality assurance, advice/coordination on external affairs, advice/coordination on Congressional and Intergovernmental affairs
  - Anticipate FEAT will be involved in ~ 5% (550) of Agency’s annual incoming FOIA requests
- Accountability remains with lead office regardless of FEAT involvement; lead office may request FEAT involvement



# FOIA Expert Assistance Team (FEAT) Composition

- Team Leader
- 5 full-time GS-11+ Staff
  - Variety of disciplines – not just attorneys
  - Key competencies for FEAT staff members
    - External and organizational awareness
    - Thorough knowledge of FOIA
    - Customer/client focus
    - Excellent written and oral communication skills



## FEAT FOIAs – Enhanced Accountability

- Within FEAT:
  - Team Members accountable to Team Leader for management of their cases
  - Team Leader accountable to Deputy General Counsel
- Within lead office:
  - DAA/DRA accountable for FOIA response
  - Senior Executive of lead office accountable to DAA/DRA
  - Staff employees accountable to Senior Executive



- Detailee brought in from R7 in August to stand up FEAT
- Background work completed
  - Key competencies for FEAT members identified
  - Position descriptions for members drafted/classification completed
  - Contacts made with key stakeholders across the Agency, including DA, Chief of Staff, OEI, OEAA, OCIR, OGC, OEX, Regional Counsels, Regional Public Affairs Officers, Information Law Attorneys, and FOIA professionals from other agencies
- Hiring process underway

- Beta Testing of review process commenced
  - Reviewed 2652 incoming FOIA requests received by Agency from August 1, 2014 –October 26, 2014
  - Identified 225 requests that would be FEAT candidates
  - Major concern identified to date:
    - Multiple requests from single requester to multiple offices requesting the same or similar information
    - Offices generally unaware of those other requests



## FEAT – Early Accomplishments

- Engaged on limited number of FOIA requests
  - 23 separate requests from single requester spanning all 10 regions – with assistance from OECA, all 23 requests withdrawn
  - Ensured coordination between region and OPA on release of potentially sensitive information
  - Facilitated coordination between OECA and region on 4 “companion” requests
  - Assisting OW on FOIA request involving multiple agencies and numerous documents
  - Contacted 6 requesters on behalf of OAR with similar outstanding requests for Beale info – one request withdrawn, able to narrow the others in manner to lessen burden on EPA staff

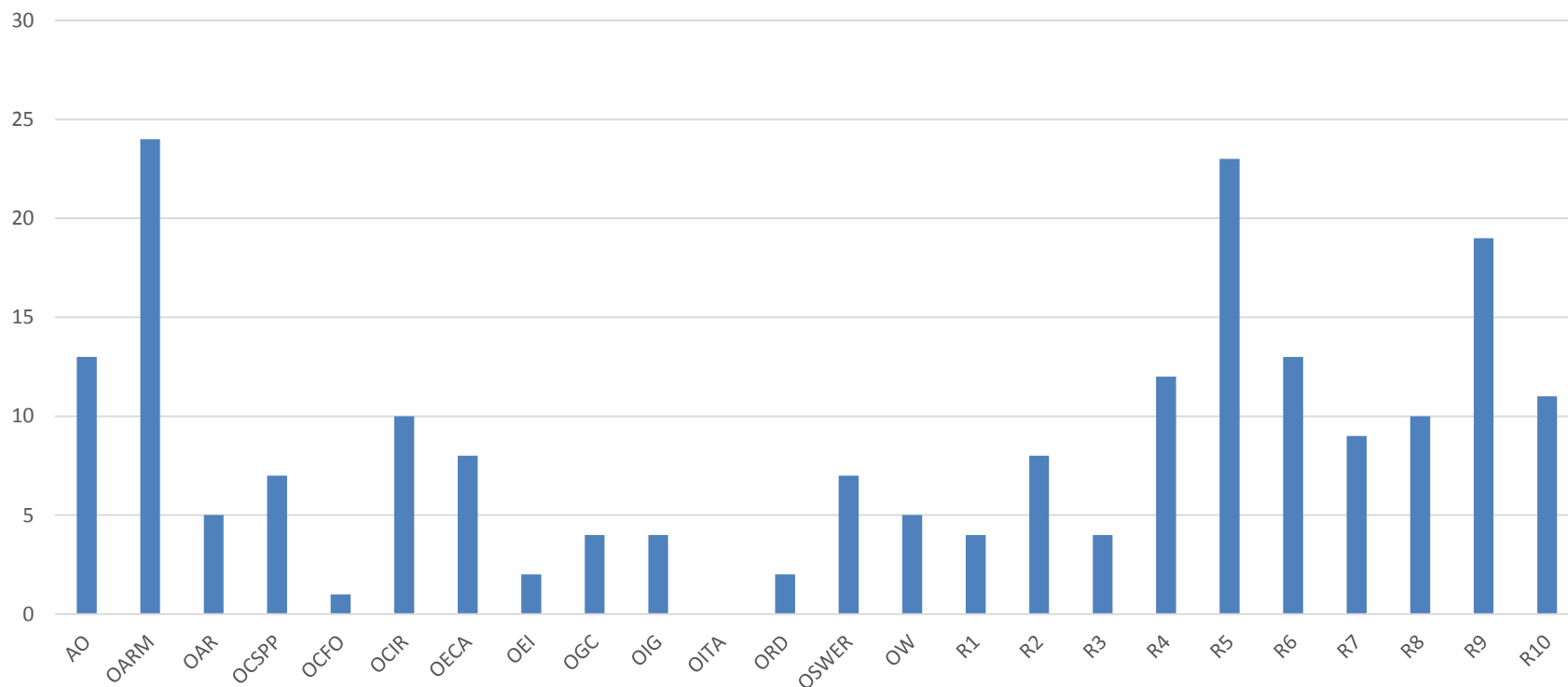
- Staff the team
- Continue beta-testing process, increasing FEAT involvement on selected FOIA requests
- Solicit feedback on operations/adjust process

**GOAL: FEAT fully staffed and fully operational by April 1, 2015**



# Possible FEAT Involvement

## 205 Selected FOIA Requests\*



\*Selected from 2422 FOIA requests received  
8/1/2014 – 10/19/2014

Agenda  
FOIA Meeting  
January 2018

- Attendance
- Backlog reduction effort report out
- Review/awareness process
- Documenting your search template
- Protected Business Information (PBI) Procedures
- Roundtable



# FOIA Monthly Meeting

February 2015



# Agenda

- FOIA Requests
- Training
- Template workgroup
- FOIAonline
  - Enhancements
  - Bulk uploads
  - Helpdesk
- MS Outlook search centralized process
  - Reprocessing
  - New FOIA requests



# Agenda

## FOIA Meeting

### February 2017

- OGC items
  - Lessons learned
  - Definition of a Record (<https://www.justice.gov/oip/blog/oip-issues-new-guidance-definition-record-and-processing-records-responsive-request>)
- Updates
  - Annual Report to the Department of Justice
  - Chief FOIA Officers Report
  - eDiscovery FOIA discussion on March 1
- FOIA Intranet (<http://intranet.epa.gov/foia/>)
  - Meeting agendas
  - Training (new – DOJ)
  - Appeal language
  - Sample letters
- FOIA Regulations
- FOIA Conference
- FOIAonline enhancements
- Your questions



# FOIA Monthly Meeting

March 2015



# Agenda

- FOIA Requests Status – Reports from Programs and Regions
- Training
  - Exemption Review
  - Other topics
- Template workgroup report
- FOIAonline
  - Enhancements
  - Bulk uploads
  - Helpdesk
- MS Outlook search centralized process
  - Reprocessing
  - New FOIA requests
- **FOIA Procedures are due March 31, 2015**

# Agenda

## FOIA Meeting

### March 2017

- Attendance
- OGC Item
  - Boolean Searching
- Updates
  - Perfecting Requests
  - Chief FOIA Officer's Report
  - ICR Letters
- FOIA Regulations
  - FOIA Fees Decision Tree
- FOIA Conference
- Workgroup
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - IT IM sub-initiative on FOIA
- Roundtable